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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6157
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002870

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/09/2011
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SUBJECT: NINEWA: PUK PERSPECTIVES ON SECURITY AND ARAB
RELATIONS

Classified By: Ninewa PRT Leader James Knight: Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Ninewa message.

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Ninewa's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) party leadership believes security is the fundamental key to political, economic and social progress in the province. PUK Director Rebaz Berkoty proposes a security conference for all political and religious groups be convened to seek consensus on solutions to insecurity and violence.

¶2. (C) Rebaz and his colleagues emphatically denied Arab allegations of mistreatment by Kurds. He also expressed strong PUK opposition to growing pressure by religious-based parties, particularly the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), to impose religious beliefs on the political system. He stressed the enduring friendship between Kurds and the USG, observing that Kurds are our 'only true friends in Iraq'. End Summary.

¶3. (SBU) PRT Leader Knight and IPAO Pope met PUK Director for Ninewa Province Rebaz Berkoty, PUK Deputy Director and Council of Representatives Member Abdubari al-Zabari, PUK Spokesman Sheikh Mohyadeen Ma'roof Mohyadeen, and PUK Liaison Officer Mohammad Sulevanay at PUK offices in Mosul for a working lunch on 2 August 2006.

TIME FOR MULTIPARTY CONSULTATIONS ON SECURITY

¶4. (C) Team Leader Knight opened conversation by asking PUK's priorities for Ninewa Province. In response, Rebaz listed PUK commitments to federal and pluralistic government for Iraq that respects the rule of law, human rights, and free expression of religious belief. Rebaz believes the majority of Iraqis support these goals, but they remain secondary to achieving a secure and peaceful environment. Rebaz pointed out that Ninewa is a mirror of Iraq as a whole, since most religious, ethnic, and political groups are represented here. As such, Ninewa is a perfect laboratory for efforts to promote peace and security.

¶5. (C) Rebaz continued by observing that all Iraqis learn to live together peacefully if they can agree to talk with each other honestly. He

suggested a multiparty peace and security conference be called by the PRT and coalition forces (CF) to build consensus on security issues. Rebaz proposed that political parties, tribes, and ethnic groups be invited to such a conference, as well as Provincial government leadership and ranking representatives of the Iraqi police and army. He offered PUK offices as a venue for such a conference.

NO KURD MISTREATMENT OF ARABS

¶16. (C) In response to PRT Leader's query regarding Arab assertions of Kurd mistreatment and territorial ambitions, Rebaz strongly denied that Kurds treat the Arabs poorly in Ninewa or show disrespect towards Arab leaders. He noted that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) enforces a necessary security policy to contain terrorist threats that might come from Ninewa. Procedures at Kurd checkpoints apply to all entering the KRG from Ninewa, Kurds included. PUK liaison officer Sulevanay noted that he himself was subjected to the same kind of searches on a recent trip to the KRG, and then given permission to remain in the KRG only ten days. Rebaz emphatically insisted that the PUK and the KRG government have no territorial ambitions in Ninewa. Such allegations by Arabs are efforts to drive a wedge between Kurds and their U.S. allies.

CONCERNS FOR RELIGIOUS PARTY INFLUENCE

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¶17. (C) When asked about relations with other political parties in Ninewa, PUK leadership present at the lunch collectively voiced concern that religious parties, particularly the IIP in Ninewa, will 'push the people toward fanaticism'. They reported that the IIP was already demanding that women in Ninewa cover their heads in accordance with the IIP's strict view of Islam, and have threatened to harm or kill women who refuse. Such efforts violate the principles of a free society and make it extremely difficult for secular parties such as the PUK to work with the IIP.

¶18. (C) Rebaz expressed particular concern about the looming possibility of IIP control of Ninewa's Provincial Government after 2007 elections. He noted that the IIP has no real power now, but is nonetheless trying to impose its constituents' religious beliefs and practices on everyone -- and asked what (more) will they do if they have real power in the future?

NEVER SELL YOUR FRIEND FOR YOUR ENEMY

¶19. (C) As the meeting closed, Rebaz emphasized to the Team Leader that Kurds are America's only true friends in Iraq -- They have been fully supportive of U.S. policies and continue to back our efforts to establish a pluralistic, free federal Iraq for all Iraqis. He worried that attempts by Arabs and others to create friction between Kurds and their American friends may undermine their mutual respect and the strong relationship that has been established. Rebaz admonished the U.S. not to abandon its friends.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) This is the first suggestion to the PRT by any political party or government office for a multiparty security conference of this kind. Similar conferences for tribal and religious leaders have often degenerated into mutual recrimination; this may not be a useful approach to address security matters. Rebaz' insistence that Kurds have no expansionist aims in Ninewa is difficult to evaluate; certainly the comportment of Kurds in Mosul -- especially among security forces -- makes this assertion a hard sell. End comment.
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